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The 1st of June 1875



AMEN

No 13

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*A Funeral Sermon.*

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A  
FUNERAL SERMON,

DELIVERED

MARCH 10, 1796,

AT THE

INTERMENT

OF

Rev. EBENEZER GAY, D.D.

*Pastor of the First Church in Suffield.*

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*By Joseph Lathrop, D.D. R*

*Pastor of the First Church in West-Springfield.*

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# GENERAL SERMON

OF THE

MARCH 17, 1790

BY

BY ABRAHAM CAT. D.D.

OF THE CHURCH OF ST. JOHN

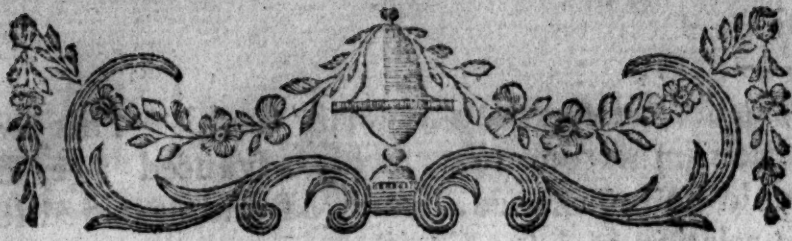
JOSEPH LATHROP D.D.

OF THE CHURCH OF ST. JOHN



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1790



## A SERMON.

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2 PETER, i. 13, 14.

*I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance, knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as the Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me.*

**P**ETER was called, early in life, to be an attendant on Jesus Christ ; and he continued in the service of his Lord to a considerable age.

Jesus, after his resurrection from the dead, having given this Apostle a particular charge to feed his flock, affectionately warned him of the trials which were before him, and of the death which he was to suffer in the cause of the gospel. “ When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldst ; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry the whither thou wouldst not. This he spake, signifying by



what death Peter should glorify God." This prediction imported, that, in his advanced age, he would be imprisoned, scourged and crucified for his relation to Jesus Christ.

Peter wrote this epistle in his old age, and under the near apprehension of his death. He says, "I know, that I must *shortly* put off this my tabernacle, as the Lord Jesus Christ shewed me." He doubtless alludes to the prediction, which has just been mentioned.

The thoughts of his approaching dissolution awakened him to zeal and diligence in his ministerial work. He determined, that he would not be negligent to put the believers in remembrance of the things which they knew, and in which they were established—that, as long as he remained in this tabernacle, he would stir them up by repeated admonitions—and would endeavor, that, after his decease, they might be able always to have in their remembrance the things which he had taught them.

These words of an aged Apostle may lead our minds into a train of thoughts suitable to the solemn occasion, on which we are assembled.

I. As Jesus Christ by his blood has purchased, and by his authority has constituted a church in the world, so he has ordained, that there should be pastors and teachers in it. Peter, who, by the immediate call of Christ himself, was appointed to the ministerial office, professed a sense of its sacred importance, and a resolution to act in it with fidelity and diligence. And as he was an elder, he charged other elders of the church to "feed the

flock of God, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind."

When Christ commissioned his disciples to go forth and preach his gospel in the world, he assured them, that there should be teachers in his church as long as time endured; and that he would always keep them under his special care and protection.

Saint Paul observes, that Christ, when he ascended on high, gave pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the Saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come, in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

Great is our advantage, that to us are committed the oracles of God, which are able to make us wise unto salvation, and to furnish us unto every good work. But such is our inattention to the interests of religion and the concerns of futurity; such is our proneness to forget the things which we have learned, and to disregard the things which we know, that we need to have them often proposed, urged and inculcated—we need line upon line, and precept upon precept. Even the *pure* minds of believers Peter "stirred up by way of remembrance."

A great part of mankind are so immersed in the cares and occupations of life, that they have neither leisure nor ability for all that study and reading, which are necessary to the acquisition of a



competent stock of religious knowledge. It is, therefore, in great condescension and goodness, that God has appointed in his church an order of men, who, being separated from the common cares of the world, may give attendance to reading, and wait on their ministring.

The institution of the Sabbath, and of public instruction, is one of the principal means of religion. If this were discontinued, the knowledge of divine things would soon be extinguished, or confined to a few.

II. Those whom Christ has appointed to be teachers in his church, are, like the rest of the human race, fallen and mortal creatures. Peter remembered the admonition given him by his Lord, at the time when he commanded him to feed his sheep, that he "must put off this tabernacle."

The gospel ministry, though a rich treasure, is put into earthen vessels. They who preach the way of salvation are men of like passions and infirmities, and subject to like temptations and sufferings with those to whom they preach.

On some special occasions superior beings have been employed to convey divine messages to our world. But for ordinary instructors of mankind none have been found so suitable, as some taken from among themselves.

When the Jews beheld the terrors of Mount Sinai, they said to Moses, "Speak thou with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die." Elihu says to Job, "Behold, I am, according to thy wish, in God's stead: I also am

formed out of the clay." Our blessed Lord, "that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest, was made in all things like unto his brethren."—"That he might be able to succour them who are tempted, he himself suffered being tempted."

The minister, being partaker of the same nature, and subject to the same feelings, with other mortals, can address them in an easy, tender and familiar manner. Being, equally with them, interested in the doctrines which he teaches, and bound to the duties which he inculcates, he can urge and press them with warmer zeal and affection. Being a sharer in the same infirmities, afflictions and temptations, as his brethren, he may know how to pity, caution and comfort them. Being, like the rest of mankind, a fallen, guilty creature, dependent on the grace of God, and subject to a future judgment, he must entertain humble thoughts of himself, and regard his sacred office as designed, not to elevate him above, but render him useful to those around him.

The treasure of the gospel ministry, as St. Paul observes, is committed to earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power in its success may appear to be of God, and not of men. He cautions the Corinthians, not to glory in men—not to rank themselves under different leaders by the name of Paul, or Apollos; for, says he, "who is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man. I have planted, and Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing nor he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase."



III. Our Apostle teaches us, that a great part of the work of a minister is to remind his people, of the things, which they already know.

When the Apostles went among heathens, who had never heard the gospel, they first "opened their eyes, and turned them from darkness to light." But when they wrote to those, who had received like precious faith with them, and to whom were already given all things which pertain to life and godliness, they considered them as needing not instruction only, but also admonition and correction.

They, who have grown up under the preaching of the gospel, may reasonably be supposed to possess a competent knowledge of its great and essential doctrines and precepts—If they need to be instructed in *these*, it is because they, in time past, have been criminally negligent. The Apostle sharply reproves some among the Hebrews, because, "when, for the time, they might have been teachers of others, they had still need that one should teach them again, what were the first principles of the oracles of God." Their slow improvement, he tells them, was owing to "the dulness of their hearing." Such dull hearers are probably too numerous in all christian assemblies.

Besides these, there are many youths, who have not had opportunity for much proficiency. On their account ministers must often preach the first principles of the doctrine of Christ; and, in the changes of their audience, repeat the same things.

But those Christians, who having already laid the foundation of repentance and of faith toward God, are going on to perfection; rather need to be

reminded of the things which they have heard, than to be instructed in things which are new.

Such is the treachery of the human heart—such a variety of worldly cares are pressing upon us—so many temptations await us—so apt is our zeal for God to cool, and our resolution in his service to languish—so easily do we forget what we have learned, and so watchful is the common adversary to steal away the good thoughts which we possess, that the purest minds need often to be stirred up by way of remembrance.

The Apostle “warned every man, and taught every man in all wisdom, that he might present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.” “To speak the same things he judged to be safe for Christians; and therefore to him it was not grievous.”

The good minister aims, not to amuse his people with novel and useless speculations; but to edify them in substantial knowledge and real godliness. In his preaching he dwells on the great and weighty matters of the gospel, that his hearers may have them always in remembrance, and thus be furnished to every good work.

The humble christian loves that preaching best, which comes home to his heart, detects his inward corruptions, warms his languid affections, strengthens his feeble resolutions, and animates him in the service of God.

4. We are farther taught, that the ministers of Christ, from the consideration of their approaching dissolution, should be excited to greater diligence in the work assigned them. Peter “would not be negligent, knowing that shortly he must put off this tabernacle.”



Death is an event so near, certain and interesting, that all, of every age and condition, ought to familiarize it to their minds, and live under its solemnizing influence.

As ministers are employed in a work of the greatest importance—a work which concerns the salvation of multitudes, as well as their own, negligence in them is peculiarly criminal. Of all men it especially concerns them to anticipate, in their meditations, the solemn day, when they must leave their people, resign their charge, retire from their work, and appear before their judge.

In the mean time, they should watch for souls, as knowing that they must give an account—and so watch, that they may give up their account with joy, and not with grief.

As this grand scene opens, in nearer view, upon their eyes, they should grow more fervent in the exercise of personal religion, and more zealous to promote the cause of the Redeemer among their fellow mortals. It should be to aged ministers, as it was to Peter, an awakening consideration, that “*shortly* they must put off their tabernacle.”

On a review of their ministry, they may perhaps accuse themselves of too great remissness; or, if they have acted with fidelity, there may however, be room for greater diligence. At best their labours have been less successful, than their benevolence has wished. They know not what the state of their people may be in future years—what errors and corruptions may be introduced among them—what deceivers may arise to draw away disciples after them—what difficulties may embarrass their attempts to provide for the continuance of

the ministry. Such thoughts will possess the minds of faithful ministers, as they find themselves advancing in life, and apprehend their dissolution to be at hand.

And they will feel a deep concern to guard their people against the dangers which threaten them, as well as to provide comfort for their own souls in the day of their departure. Paul says to the elders of the church of Ephesus, "I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over which the holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know, that, after my departure shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember that I have not ceased to warn every one, day and night with tears." As the consideration of his departure excited him to diligence, so a review of his diligence brought him comfort at his departure. "I am ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness."

5. If a minister, from the consideration of his mortality, should be excited to fidelity in the service of his people; they, from the same consideration, should be awakened to diligence in attending on his ministry. If he must stir up their minds by putting them in remembrance, they must give earnest heed to the things which they hear, lest by any means they should let them slip.



When we view ourselves as transient mortals, soon to quit this probationary state, and enter on a state of everlasting retribution, nothing can be, or *seem* to be of much importance to us, but that diligence in duty—that fidelity to God—that beneficence to mankind—and that attention to our own souls, which will give peace to the conscience, ensure the divine approbation, and entitle to the rewards of immortality.

It is amazing, that when we see ourselves in a dying world, and know that we are only probationers here, our thoughts can be so much absorbed in the things of time, and so little employed on those mighty scenes which soon will open upon our sight.

Every thing around us tells us, we are mortal—tells us, we are accountable; and urges us to diligence in the work assigned us.

We daily see one and another of our fellow mortals dropping by our side. Some will soon see us fall in the same manner. The minister is frequently called to the mournful office of attending the dying bed of a beloved member of his flock. There is a time, when people behold their minister putting off his tabernacle. Such scenes should awaken ministers and people to strive together in their labours and prayers for the salvation of immortal souls, and the general interest of Christ's kingdom.

Such a scene is now before us, there lies, in mournful ruins, the earthly tabernacle, which the aged pastor of this church has just put off. The

immortal inhabitant, we trust, has ascended to dwell with his Lord, which is far better than to abide in the flesh.

Doctor GAY, was born in Dedham, near Boston, in May 1718, received the honours of Harvard University in July 1737, and was ordained to the ministerial office in this town in January 1742. He lived to surpass the 54th year of his ministry, and almost to complete the 78th year of his age. It is remarkable, that, of seven brethren, the Doctor is the first who has deceased; and, of the six who survive, four are more than seventy, and the youngest more than sixty years of age.

The Doctor was so extensively known, and, where he was known, so universally esteemed, that a full portrait of his character is unnecessary, and will not here be attempted. Some general touches, however, may be of use to assist us in improving the death, and retaining the remembrance of so good and amiable a minister.

He was a man of a strong mind and superior learning, of a clear and discerning intellect, a cool and penetrating judgment, unshaken fortitude and inflexible integrity. In conversation he was pleasant and instructive, and sometimes agreeably facetious, and innocently humorous. He was easy of access, given to hospitality, faithful in his friendships, free from dissimulation, tender in domestic relations a most obliging neighbor, and a lover of mankind.

He was an able and learned Divine—a scribe well instructed into the kingdom of God, bringing forth out of his treasure things new and old. He was a wise and judicious counsellor, and an



entertaining and instructive preacher. His public discourses were composed with attention, and enriched with sentiment. His thoughts were naturally arranged and clearly expressed. His style was neat, pure and elegant, yet easy and familiar; and while it descended to the lowest capacity, it was suited to the most refined taste.

His religious sentiments were formed on the gospel plan; not on human creeds. Attached to no system, and calling no man master, he repaired directly to the fountain of truth, that from thence he might draw divine knowledge pure and uncorrupt.

The doctrines of grace were conspicuous in his discourses. He preached them abundantly and preached them in the *apostolic* manner—in a manner which tended to exalt the glory of God, humble the pride of man, and evince the necessity of repentance, holiness and good works.

He was steady in his principles; but, despising bigotry, he ever manifested an amiable liberality of spirit. He never was severe to censure, or forward to condemn those of different sentiments; but disposed to think candidly, and hope charitably of all, who appeared to possess the christian temper.

As prudence marked, so peace attended his steps thro' the whole course of his ministry; and the harmony with which it commenced, has, without interruption, been continued to the close.

In a word, he passed thro' life with a character pure and unstained, and finished his course with the serenity of christian hope.

In the latter part of his life, he suffered much from bodily disorders, which often confined him for weeks together. But before he was wholly disabled from the labours of the ministry, he was happy to see his people disposed to provide him an assistant, and united in the choice of his son to serve with him in the gospel.

After this transaction, he, under increasing infirmities, protracted his life three years, and then closed this mortal scene.

My brethren of this church and society ;

Your case brings to our mind that of the Jewish church at the death of Aaron the high priest.

The aged priest was warned of his approaching death, and commanded to go up into mount Hor, that he might die there. The good man obeyed without reluctance. That there might be no interruption of the priesthood, Eleazar his son, by divine direction, ascended with him. And there the pontifical robes were taken from the father and put upon the son. Then Aaron died on the mount, and Eleazar came down to the people. And when all the congregation saw, that Aaron was dead, tho' they loved the son, yet they mourned the death of the father.

The priests are not suffered to continue by reason of death : But, among you, the priesthood has suffered little interruption.

After the death of your first minister, the vacancy was supplied in less than two years. After the



death of the second, it continued only a few months. In the present change, the ministry has not ceased at all. In the space of almost a century, you have been destitute of an ordained minister, no more than two years and seven months.

It becomes you thankfully to regard the particular care, which the great head of the church has exercised over you.

The death of Doctor Gay is sensibly felt, and sincerely lamented by you all; and especially by those who have known him from the beginning of his ministry. A connection so long continued, so useful and so pleasant, cannot be broken without heart-felt anguish. It is a painful thought, that you can no more hear his voice, enjoy his conversation, nor join in his devotions. But rejoice in the goodness of God, which has preserved him among you to so respectable an age, and rendered his ministry so profitable to you. Let his death deeply impress on your hearts the things which you have heard from his mouth, that now, after his decease, you may have them always in remembrance. Bless the God of the spirits of all flesh, who has raised up in the house of his servant a pastor for you, and has set a man over this congregation, to go in and out before them, that they might not be as sheep which have no shepherd. Strengthen and encourage the heart of your young pastor by a faithful attendance on his ministry, and by peace among yourselves. Shew kindness to the dead by your attention to and prayers for his afflicted family, especially his surviving partner, now stooping under her sorrow, and mourning a loss, which nothing earthly can repair.

We wish you, Madam, those divine consolations, which are not small.

Your departed friend has instructed many ; his words have strengthened the weak and upholden him that was falling. His counsels to them, who have felt afflictions like yours, often have you heard ; and you will now have them daily in remembrance. His removal will be a new motive to call off your thoughts and affections from earth, and direct them to heaven ; you will contemplate the approaching day, when you must put off your tabernacle. You will apply the gracious promises, which God has made to the afflicted, and especially to the widow, you will follow them, who, thro' faith and patience inherit the promises. You will look unto Jesus, who, for the joy set before him, endured the cross, and is now set down on the throne of God ; and who from thence hears the humble prayers of the sorrowful, and answers them with sufficient grace. The experience which you have already had of the goodness of God, in placing your eldest son in his present connection, will awaken in you sentiments of gratitude, and encourage your future reliance on his providence.

May you, the children of the deceased, while you mourn your loss in the removal of so excellent a parent, remember, with gratitude, the superior advantages which you have enjoyed under his prudent and faithful care. " You are witnesses, how holily, justly and unblamably he behaved himself among you ; and you know how he comforted, exhorted and charged every one of you, as a father ought his children, that you would walk worthy of God, who hath called you to his kingdom and glory." While he was in this tabernacle, he was



not negligent to put you in mind of these things, that ye might know them, and be established in them. Endeavour now, after his decease, to have them always in remembrance.

Comfort your surviving parent, whose personal affliction is augmented by the share which she takes in yours. She will be comforted over you, in all her affliction and distress, by your faith; for now she lives, if you stand fast in the Lord.

You, my young brother in the ministry, will, in your situation, naturally care for her. The exemplary attention, which you paid to your father, under all his infirmities, forbids the smallest suspicion, that you will forget your mother, when she is old. Let me apply the tender intimation of Jesus from the cross. "Behold thy mother. Woman behold thy son."

My brother; as the aged priest is gathered to his people, and you are clothed with his garments, you will consider, that the garments are holy, and will watch to keep them unstained. You will remember, that to this sacred attire belongs a mitre for the head, on which is written, HOLINESS TO THE LORD; and a breastplate near the heart, in which are wrought *the names of the children of Israel.*

Let holiness be conspicuous in your life, and in all things shew yourself a pattern of good works. Bear the people on your heart continually, when you come before God. Let their names be written on your breast, in letters of love, when you enter into the holy place.

The priestly robes will not secure from death. Your father, where is he? Be not negligent in your work, knowing that shortly you must put off this tabernacle, as the Lord this day has shewed you.

Of the surviving brethren one only is present to join the solemn train of mourners. The admonitions daily given him by the infirmities of age, are enforced by the death of a brother, that he must soon put off his tabernacle.

We wish you, sir, an abundant supply of the grace of God, to comfort you in your sorrow, to direct your improvement of the present affliction, and to assist your preparation for your own departure.

May you be able to take pleasure in infirmities, knowing that the power of Christ resteth upon you, and that your salvation is nearer, than when you believed. Filled with the hopes of religion, may you forget the sorrows of life, or remember them as waters, which pass away. May your age be clearer than the noon; may it shine forth as the morning; may you take your rest in safety, and be secure because there is hope.

My brethren in the ministry have already applied to themselves our present subject, and the providence which has pointed us to it. They need not my admonition to put them in remembrance.

Every death, which falls under our notice, especially the death of a minister, reminds us, that we must put off our tabernacle. To some of us the time is near. Our aged friend and counsellor is gone. We find ourselves drawing after him,



Let us fill our remaining days with diligence in our work, and not reckon our own lives dear to ourselves, that we may finish our course with joy, and the ministry which we have received of the Lord Jesus to testify the gospel of the grace of God.

The institution of the holy supper was the last act of Christ's public ministry. The administration of that ordinance was the last ministerial act of this his deceased servant. At this table and in the time of the communion, he received from his Lord the last remarkable warning that he must shortly put off his tabernacle.

It was a day peculiarly solemn, as being the last, in which he was allowed to come into the house of the Lord, break the bread of his table, and bless the people in his name.

The day is coming with respect to each of us, when it may be said, "This is the last time."

Let the minister realize, that there will be a last time, when he shall meet his people in the sanctuary: Let them consider, that there will be a last time, when they shall hear the word of God from his mouth. Let him speak as a dying man to mortal hearers. Let them so receive the word, that, after his decease, they may have it always in remembrance.

The parent should remember, that there will be a last time, when he shall be able to instruct and counsel his children, and to pray with them and for them: They should remember, that the day is coming, when they shall enjoy his parental assistance no more. Let children obey their parents

in all things which are pleasing to God. Let the parent bring up his children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Friends and neighbors often meet to spend a social hour and cheer each other's hearts. Relatives, who, in the vicissitude of human affairs, are placed at a distance from each other, now and then exchange their kind and pleasant visits, and thus revive the friendly feelings, and preserve the reciprocal affections, which by absence, began to languish. But the time is coming, when this convivial circle will be broken up, and this cordial interchange of visits will be discontinued.

There will be a last time, when this, and that companion will sit down at the social board—a last time when the aged father will collect his fainting spirits to visit a distant child; or the child, prompted by filial duty, will pay a visit to his declining parent—a last time, when brother, and brother, will meet in the old paternal mansion, to refresh the heart of the parent, and to participate in each other's joy. The meeting soon will be of a different complexion, and for a different purpose, to deposit in the dust the faithful guide of their youth, and divide among them the substance which he has left.

How careful should we be to render our social interviews beneficial, by cultivating peace and friendship, by suggesting sentiments of piety and by animating each other in the heavenly course.

This is doubtless the last time, that we *all* shall meet in the same worshipping assembly. Some of us must *shortly* put off this tabernacle. Let us dai-



ly contemplate our change, and stand prepared to meet it.

“Let us follow peace with all men and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord, looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, and consider one another to provoke unto love and good works; not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, but exhorting one another, and so much the more, as we see the day approaching.”

“The end of all things is at hand; let us therefore be sober and watch unto prayer; and above all things have fervent charity among ourselves.”

Happy they, whom their Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing.

